Feedback Workshop

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**How to use the resources**

The Feedback workshop is broadly structured around Sutton’s (2012) conceptualisation of feedback literacy, which is defined as “the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback (Sutton, 21012, p. 31). Sutton argues that being literate in the use of feedback involves an ontological dimension (‘being’), an epistemological dimension (‘knowing’) and a practical dimension (‘acting’). The activities within the workshop enable students to develop and practice strategies and skills for putting feedback into practice, as well as supporting the development of their feedback literacy in these three areas.

The workshop resource is intended to be flexible. By selecting a set of activities, educators can design a workshop tailored to the needs of their students. One way of using the workshop resources would be to work through all the activities sequentially during a series of tutorials. Another would be to design a workshop involving one activity from the ‘knowing’ component, one activity from the ‘being’ component, and one activity from the ‘acting’ component. Educators may also wish to use individual activities as stand-alone sessions, to target a particular skill or provide a refresher for students at more advanced stages of their programme of study. Where applicable, worksheet/resource templates are also included.

The ‘knowing’ dimension of feedback literacy involves a student’s awareness that feedback provides information *on* knowing; that is, it provides information on their current levels of understanding and skill. However, an equally important function of feedback is *for* knowing- to drive students’ learning and skill development. Whilst many students are keenly aware of the former function, and can interpret a grade or mark, Sutton argues that “engagement with feedback *for* learning is more challenging” (p. 34).

The first activity encourages students to consider the different functions and sources of feedback, as a way for them to appreciate the distinction between feedback *on* and feedback *for* knowing. The second activity in this section provides students with the opportunity to become familiar with the institution’s grading criteria/rubrics, and to develop skills of self-assessment. The third and final activity in this section is designed to extend students’ appreciation of feedback *for* knowing, by developing their understanding of the learning potential of feedback information.

The ‘being’ dimension of feedback literacy recognises the personal investment on the part of students in the process of assessment, and how feedback has the potential to shape the learner’s identity. The first activity in this section directly addresses this issue, by enabling students to explore their own learner identity and how this is shaped by assessment and feedback. The second activity requires students to surface the potential barriers that might inhibit their engagement with feedback, and to develop solutions to overcome such barriers. The third and final activity in this section directly addresses the emotions that are surfaced by receiving feedback, and encourages students to consider how these emotions can be harnessed to support future development.

The ‘acting’ dimension of feedback literacy involves the skills necessary to read, understand and implement feedback. The activities in this section are more strongly targeted to the implementation of feedback information. The first activity provides an opportunity for students to develop a ‘toolkit’ of actions that can be taken upon receiving a particular piece of feedback. The second activity enables students to develop the ability to set action points and targets, and monitor progress towards them. The third and final activity in this section gives learners the opportunity to reflect on the relative role of the educator and student in the implementation of feedback.

Activity K1: The purpose and function of feedback

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Small group discussion and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource K1*

***Learning objective:* To enable students to consider the many sources, forms and functions of feedback, and to develop a shared definition of feedback.**

## Activity Guidance

The end point of this activity is the development of a working definition of feedback that is shared by students and the workshop facilitator. To achieve this, students should first be invited to consider responses to the following questions:

* What is the function of feedback? (for student, for lecturer, for university, etc)
* What is feedback?
* From where and whom does feedback come?
* What effects does feedback have?

These questions should be considered by students individually, or discussed in pairs or small groups. Students then feed back their responses to the class and the workshop facilitator manages discussion, to develop a shared working definition of feedback that incorporates the students’ responses to these questions.

Activity K2: Standards and Criteria

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Small group discussion and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *An exemplar essay; a copy of relevant marking schemes/grading criteria used within your department or institution*

***Learning objective:* To develop students’ assessment literacy through discussion and application of marking criteria and standards.**

## Activity Guidance

The workshop facilitator should begin by leading a discussion focused on the marking schemes/grading criteria that are used to assess students’ work. Particular emphasis could be given to:

* Explaining the grade descriptors (e.g. differentiating ‘good’, ‘very good’, ‘excellent’) and how the expectations differ between grade boundaries
* Explaining individual criteria that are mentioned in the marking schemes, and which the marker takes into account when assessing work
* Explaining the weighting of different criteria in the grading process (for example, the relative importance of spelling/grammar versus critical evaluation)

Following this discussion of marking criteria and how they are applied, students should be given a copy of an exemplar assignment. Either individually or in pairs/small groups, they should be instructed to read the assignment and then use the marking scheme/grading criteria to decide what grade they would award it. This can be done either by assigning a specific grade, or just placing the assignment within an appropriate grade-band. This exercise could be done using standardised marking sheets/feedback pro formas, to allow the student to fully take the position of a marker.

Students should then share the grades they have awarded. This could be done anonymously so that students do not adjust their mark to fit with what others propose. Students should also discuss what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the exemplar assignment. The facilitator should then lead a group discussion around the possible reasons for any discrepancies between the marks of different individuals/groups, and reaching a consensus on what would be an appropriate grade for the work. Any misunderstandings or areas of confusion should be clarified. After the workshop, students could be encouraged to apply what they have learned by self-assessing a draft of their own work using the grading criteria/mark schemes.

Activity K3: Feedback as a learning resource

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Individual work and small group discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource K3*

***Learning objective:* To provide students insight into what can be learned from the process of using feedback, and to understand how feedback is a tool for learning, in the same way as a lecture or tutorial can be.**

## Activity Guidance

The session should begin with a discussion of feedback and how it might contribute to learning (unless already covered in Activity K1). Each student should receive a copy of Resource K3, which lists possible actions that a student could potentially take after receiving feedback on an assignment. Students could work either individually or in small groups to consider each feedback action in turn, and suggesting what can be learnt from taking that action. For example:

***Possible Action:*** *Picking a few sentences from your assignment and thinking from the marker’s perspective about how clearly those sentences are expressed.*

***Examples of what might be learned from taking this action****:*

* *What the marker might expect*
* *Common stylistic features of your writing that warrant attention*
* *How others might interpret your meaning differently to how it was intended*
* *That something that seemed clear to you may not be clear to others*

Once the worksheet has been completed, students can share their ideas through a class discussion.

Activity B1: Feedback and identity

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Small group discussion and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource B1*

***Learning objective:* To help students to appreciate that feedback comments can be interpreted differently according to the receiver’s sense of learner identity.**

## Activity Guidance

The workshop facilitator should begin by separating the class into groups, and providing each group with a piece of feedback (for example, the feedback provided in Resource B1). The groups should first be asked to read this feedback carefully, and to briefly discuss its strengths and weaknesses with the other members of their group.

Next, each group should be given a ‘character profile’ as illustrated in Resource B1. Each of these profiles describes a different person along with information about their learning approaches, and character traits relevant to their learning such as their self-confidence and motivation. The students should ideally be unaware that other groups have received different ‘characters’. Groups should be asked to discuss how the person described in their character profile might understand the piece of feedback, and importantly, to discuss what that person might infer about themselves on the basis of the feedback comments. Groups should then be asked to feed back their ideas to the class. The workshop facilitator should lead a discussion of the discrepancies between groups’ responses, revealing that each group received different character profiles. Students should be asked to consider why the character profiles would lead to different interpretations of the same feedback. The students might then be encouraged to reflect on what they would infer about themselves if they received that piece of feedback, and to discuss how these reactions relate to their learner identities.

Activity B2: Overcoming barriers

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Small group discussion and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource B2*

***Learning objective:* To enable students to consider the factors that prevent them from engaging with feedback, and to develop an understanding of strategies to overcome these barriers.**

## Activity Guidance

The session should begin with a general discussion about what makes using feedback so difficult. It might be useful for the facilitator to guide discussion, such that students do not solely focus on criticising the feedback they receive. Features of the feedback may be one of the barriers to implementing it, but students should be encouraged to think more broadly about the potential factors that might make it difficult to make use of feedback.

Next, students should be divided into groups, and each student given a copy of Resource B2.The facilitator should explain that these are quotes from actual students, when talking about their experiences with feedback. In their groups, students should discuss the quotes and extract commonalities between them. Ideally, students should try to generate four broad themes of barrier to using feedback, and sort the quotes into these groups.

Each group then feeds back their themes to the rest of the class. It might be useful to discuss differences between the themes extracted by each group. The session could then conclude with a discussion about potential solutions that could be offered to overcome the barriers that have been identified.

Activity B3: Using emotion positively

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Individual work with facilitated group discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource B3*

***Learning objective:* To enable students to understand the importance of the emotions elicited by feedback, and to appreciate the role of emotion in driving their future development.**

Students should bring along to the workshop a piece of written feedback they have received on their own work. They should be encouraged to read through the feedback in the workshop, and to select a few phrases that elicit (or elicited) emotions, either positive or negative. They should then attempt to critically reflect on how they feel, and on how they can use those pieces of feedback and their own feelings to help decide what to do differently next time.

It may be useful to discuss the functions of emotion in the process of receiving feedback, for example, *Even though reading negative feedback can be difficult, if we can sit with that feedback, it can really change the way we do things and can make us more independent as learners.”*

Activity A1: The process of action

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Individual work and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *None*

***Learning objective:* To enable students to appreciate the importance of acting on feedback, and to reflect upon and share their strategies for putting feedback into action.**

## Activity Guidance

The session should begin with a discussion of why it is important to act upon feedback. Students are then instructed to work individually, and write down a list of the things they do upon receiving feedback. These might range from simply reading it through to more proactive strategies such as keeping a list of common comments, or seeking guidance from a tutor or learning advisor. The facilitator should emphasise that students’ lists will remain completely anonymous. The facilitator collects all the individual lists and shares the actions with the group, ideally by writing them on a whiteboard so that all students can see the list.

Next, divide students into groups and ask them to discuss the list of actions, and rank them in order from least to most effective, considering the reasons for their ranking. Each group then feeds back to the rest of the class. A useful topic for discussion is how those that had been ranked as least effective could be reframed to become more effective. Students could also be invited to reflect on whether they think they do enough with their feedback.

Activity A2: Identifying actions

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Small group discussion and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource A2*

***Learning objective:* To enable students to develop a ‘bank’ of actions that they can take in response to feedback they receive.**

## Activity Guidance

Students should be presented with a list of illustrative feedback comments (see Resource A2 for examples). The workshop facilitator should split students into small groups, and assign a few comments to each group. Each illustrative comment should highlight an area of practice in which a hypothetical student need to improve, and groups should discuss each comment and come up with a list of ‘actions’ that could be taken to improve on this area of practice. The students could can either write these directly into the spaces on Resource A1, or list their actions on a large piece of paper to facilitate sharing amongst groups.

For example, if the comment is ‘*you need to evaluate your points more thoroughly’*, then possible actions might include ‘*make notes on points of evaluation as I am studying*; ‘*talk to my lecturers about what they are expecting to see in terms of evaluation*’; ‘*speak to a study advisor about strategies to improve my evaluation*’.

If students struggle to come up with actions, then the facilitator could scaffold the discussion by providing headings under which to list action points, such as ‘*things I can do in my own study tim*e’; ‘*people I could go to for further support*’, ‘*resources I could use*’, etc. Each group should then share with the whole class the action plans for the comments they received, and the workshop facilitator should encourage class discussion. At the end of this activity, students should be able to take away a ‘bank’ of actions they could consider taking the next time they receive similar feedback comments.

Activity A3: Action planning

***Suggested Activity Format:*** *Individual work and class discussion*

***Suggested Resources:*** *Resource A3*

Learning objective: To enable students to develop the skills required to create an action plan on the basis of feedback received on their work.

## Activity Guidance

For this activity, students should be instructed to bring to the session a piece of feedback that they have received on one of their assignments. The facilitator should begin by explaining to students how effective action planning requires identifying a) the area that needs to be developed; b) what actions need to be taken to enable this development; and c) what information would be needed in order to evaluate whether those actions had been effectual.

Students should then be given a copy of Resource A3, and instructed to go through their own feedback individually, extracting around three areas that the marker has identified need to be developed. They should then complete the worksheet by thinking about how they could develop that skill, and how they will know that they have been successful in improving that skill. Before beginning this activity, it might be useful for the facilitator to go through an example with students.

Once all students have completed the worksheet individually, students can be invited to share the actions that they are planning to take. It is likely that many of the issues identified in the first column of the table will be common across students, so it may be beneficial for students to hear what actions others have considered to address a similar issue.

Resource K1: The purpose and function of feedback

**What is feedback?**

**From where and from whom do you receive feedback?**

**What should be the benefits of feedback…**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **… from the perspective of the student who receives it?** | **… from the perspective of the person who marks your work?** | **… from the perspective of your university?** |
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**DEFINITION OF FEEDBACK**

Resource K3: Feedback as a tool for learning

Below is a list of things that you might do when engaging with the written feedback comments you receive. What might you learn about yourself, about your work, or about the marker, by taking each of these actions?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Action** | **What might be learned by taking this action?** |
| Looking at the marking scheme, and trying to figure out how you could achieve the next level |  |
| Identifying what targets you have been set by the marker |  |
| Looking at the grade you received |  |
| Picking a few sentences from your work, and thinking about how clearly those sentences are expressed |  |
| Taking one aspect of your work, such as your evaluation or structure, and thinking what you could do to improve |  |
| Looking through your feedback for all the things your marker has told said you did well |  |
| Making an action plan based on your feedback, aiming to look beyond just your next piece of work |  |

Resource B1: Feedback and Identity

*The following piece of feedback was given in response to a student’s essay:*

You covered quite a good range of material in your essay. However, you presented a lot of unreferenced arguments. You also relied too heavily upon secondary sources – review papers and book chapters that summarised the topic for you. The integration of material in this essay was good, but there was room for improvement in terms of the critical evaluation of the evidence. There was a tendency to accept other authors’ claims as truth rather than to question and test them. You present some valid points of critical analysis but these are not always used to address the question. Clearly link these points of critique to your argument so that we know what implications they have for the conclusions we might draw. Should we adjust our perception with reference to the question on the basis of the evidence presented in a section? Your overall structure is clear but you need to work on your paragraph transitions. In many places, your argument can be difficult to follow because you move between different topics without clear signposting to the reader. The essay also contains a very large number of errors, and in many cases these are severe enough that your arguments do not make sense. There is no evidence that the material has been proof-read.

# Character Profile

**Sam is a second-year Undergraduate student. She/he got very good grades at college, but really worries about her/his performance at University. Sam is often desperate to learn every part of the lecture material, and often does a lot of extra reading for an assignment, but finds it difficult to integrate everything. This causes Sam to panic, and every draft of every essay always feels as though it is rubbish. Sam hates submitting work as it never feels good enough, and she/he is then worried during the whole time it is being marked. When a piece of work is returned, Sam is frightened to look at the comments, for fear of what they might say.**

1. How might Sam interpret the feedback comments?
2. What might Sam think or feel about herself/himself as a result of receiving these comments?

# Character profile

**Sam is a second-year Undergraduate student. She/he got very good grades at college, and is really confident about her/his performance at University, being certain that she/he will get a First Class degree. Sam attends all lectures and tutorials but does not feel the need to take detailed notes, as this approach has always paid off in the past. Alex loves submitting work, as she/he feels that the work is of such high quality that the marker will be very impressed. Sam can hardly wait for marked work to be returned, and is excited to see what the marker has said about the work.**

1. How might Sam interpret the feedback comments?
2. What might Sam think or feel about herself/himself as a result of receiving these comments?

Resource B2: Overcoming Barriers

*These comments are taken from Focus Group discussions with students, about their experiences with feedback, as reported in the following paper:*

Winstone, N.,Nash, R., Rowntree, J., & Parker, M. (in press). “It’d be useful, but I wouldn’t use it”. Barriers to University students’ feedback seeking and recipience. *Studies in Higher Education.*

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| *If the marker tells me that parts of my argument are hard to follow I wouldn’t know which bits were hard to follow, and which bits I need to look at to see why it wasn’t quite right. This might be quite tricky to find yourself, as obviously you’ve written it, so you think it’s alright.* |
| *If I need to improve the structure of my work, I need more teaching. It’s something that’s innate.* |
| *There are so many lecturers and so many subjects; I don’t think I’ve ever got feedback that’s been the same.* |
| *I get angry with my feedback. Like, I got a mark back the other day, on my last piece of coursework and I wasn’t happy with it. I read what the marker had written and thought ‘Oh well – that’s your opinion!’* |
| *I think it is so hard to take on feedback on board, as you've got your own specific writing style and you're so stuck in your way.* |
| *Sometimes you don’t know what to do with the comments. Although the marker might have made a valid point, you don’t know where in your essay they want you to have done something.* |
| *I generally just take the mark as more important than the written feedback. I mean, the feedback is useful, but if I've got a mark of seventy, I don't really care what the feedback says!* |
| *When I was writing an essay, I probably wouldn’t ever go back and look at the feedback I’d had before. Which is something I probably could do more.* |
| *It’s horrible. The feedback you get is really harsh! And it’s just like, ‘Well, okay! I’m not looking at that, it’s just negative!’* |
| *Sometimes feedback is written in really fancy language. They’re just saying it in a really roundabout way rather than just ‘You need to make clearer arguments’.* |
| *If I feel that feedback is generic to everyone, I just discard it. If I think its individual to me, I will read it and probably use it again.* |
| *I haven’t spoken to lecturers before, but I know that you can do that, I mean they do offer feedback in that sense.* |
| *If there is feedback on something negative, but there’s something clear enough that I can change, I would give it a lot of attention. But if it’s something negative and really general, I feel like I can’t change it, and I won’t pay attention to it.* |
| *I should read it. And then have it out when I’m then writing the next bit of coursework. But realistically, I normally sort of skim over it. I suppose I do probably take in points from it, but then you kind of file it away with your coursework.* |
| *I think sometimes it can be a bit difficult to read your feedback in front of friends, because you quite easily make comparisons between you and other people.* |
| *I’m very careful to find out who’s marking it and then I try to phrase my work in the way I think they want it.* |
| *When I get a piece of work back, I'm really bad, and I'm just like, 'Oh, that's my mark, put it away now.'* |
| *I get quite a lot of markers saying, ‘You need to expand on this more.’ And it’s like, ‘Well, if I expand on this, I’m going to have to lose something else. So, what should I lose?’ Because it’s sort of that balance, which can be quite frustrating.* |
| *I think markers expect us to read all of the feedback, but I don't know if they realise how little we understand the stuff that they say.* |
| *I hate when they say stuff say about your use of commas, because I have used commas, like I'm not stupid, I know how to use commas. Just say 'This could be clearer.' Don't say 'Your use of commas is not always appropriate.'* |
| *I know people, and they put on Facebook, ‘I got a first! I’m so pleased!’ And you think, ‘Oh, I wonder how you did that?’* |
| *I think it’s fine if markers make a critical comment, but then they need to make a suggestion how to improve the critique that they’re making of my work. Otherwise I’m not going to pay much attention to it* |
| *I think for me it was mostly about the mark, rather than the details of the feedback that you got. I don’t know, but that’s what I talk about with my friends.* |
| *Feedback is too specific to that particular piece of work. I definitely wouldn’t use it on another piece of work.* |
| *I usually get quite angry whenever I read feedback, because they say things like 'This isn't clear. I know what I'm trying to say, and I think 'What do you mean it's not clear, like, it's right there on paper!* |
| *Sometimes feedback says that there’s a lot of errors, but it doesn’t necessarily say which bits are errors and which bits aren’t. So it’s quite hard moving forward, I guess, as the feedback is just a bit too vague and non-specific.* |
| *I do tend to go pick up my coursework with one person but, like, there’s a guy I usually sit next to in lectures, and I’ll go and get it with him. But, he tends to do a bit better than me, so I think sometimes you don’t really want to talk about your feedback.* |

Resource B3: Feedback and emotion

Read through a piece of feedback that you have received. Pick out a few phrases that the marker has written. Try to reflect on your emotional reactions to these comments, and then think about their consequences: do these feelings help you in any way? Or do they have negative consequences?

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| **Key message** | **What is my emotional reaction?** | **Is this emotional reaction helpful? Is it harmful? Or is it a bit of both?** |
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Resource A2: Taking action!

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| You need to be more evaluative in your writing |
| Aim for a more coherent argument |
| Your writing could be more concise |
| You could achieve a better balance between description and evaluation |
| You can make stronger use of research evidence to support your argument |
| Your structure could be clearer |
| Check that your sentence structure is correct |
| Make sure that you are fully meeting the learning objectives for each assignment |
| Revise your understanding of punctuation and grammar |
| Make sure that you consider counterarguments to the positions you present |
| You need to ensure that a clearer answer to the question comes across to the reader |
| Try to use a wider range of sources to provide support for your argument |

Resource A3: Action Planning

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Target | What actions will you take to achieve this target? | How will you know you have achieved the target? |
| 1. |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |